Twitter Thread by Lauren Thoman



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I should mention, this is why I keep talking about this. Because I know so many people who legally CAN'T.

How do I know they have NDAs, if they can't talk legally about them? Because they trusted me with their secrets... after I said something. That's how they knew I was safe.

> And if the environment at the org was toxic or abusive, it is not uncommon to not realize the extent of that toxicity/abuse until after you're out. But by the time you realize that you signed under duress and presumed good faith where none existed, you're out of options.
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> — Lauren Thoman (@LaurenThoman) February 16, 2021

Some of the people who have reached out to me privately have been sitting with the pain of what happened to them and the regret that they signed for YEARS. But at the time, it didn't seem like they had any other option BUT to sign.

I do not blame *anyone* for signing an NDA, especially when it's attached to a financial lifeline. When you feel like your family's wellbeing is at stake, you'll do anything -- even sign away your own voice -- to provide for them. That's not a "choice"; that's survival.

And yes, many of the people whose stories I now know were pressured into signing an NDA by my husband's ex-employer. Some of whom I *never* would have guessed. People I thought "left well." Turns out, they've just been *very* good at abiding by the terms of their NDA.

(And others who have reached out had similar experiences with other Christian orgs. Turns out abuse, and the use of NDAs to cover up that abuse, is rampant in a LOT of places.)

If you think your Christian org is immune bc you don't know of anyone who's ever been pressured to sign an NDA, consider that perhaps the reason you don't know is because you simply haven't been entrusted with that information yet, because you have not shown yourself to be safe.

How do you show yourself to be safe? Listen to the stories being shared. Don't shy away from uncomfortable truth. And then SPEAK UP. Don't presume anyone will understand you are an ally unless you SHOW yourself to be an ally.

If a Christian org truly has nothing to hide, they will not be threatened by you speaking up for the abused and the marginalized. So if you worry that saying something may put you in an uncomfortable position with that org... ask yourself why you feel that way.

Here's a mistake I made: I assumed that if things were really *so bad*, that friends who had left would TELL me. If they didn't offer to share their experience with me, I figured it was because they didn't want to talk about it.

This can definitely be true for some. But what I came to realize is that many people don't feel safe sharing their stories with someone who hasn't given any indication that they're prepared to listen, or grapple with the difficult truth in those stories.

So until *I* showed myself to be a safe person to tell, of COURSE no one was offering up their stories to me. You learn to be very careful in who you trust once you've been deeply wronged by people you trust.

Proving yourself to be safe is not a formula. It's a feeling which differs for everyone, based on their personal experience. So you don't get to decide when you've done "enough" to be considered a safe person by others.

But I think one thing that is pretty universal is being considered safe begins with ACTION, not passivity. Maybe that's asking a friend who you suspect has a hard story if they're comfortable sharing it with you. Maybe it's posting on social media. Maybe it's an apology.

A thing that pretty much never qualifies you as a safe person? Silence and/or complicity with an abuser or abusive org while waiting for someone to share their painful story with you if it's *really* that big a deal. That's a good way to hear nothing but crickets.

So if you think your org is fine bc you haven't heard any bad stories - besides what haters & people who "just don't get it" say, anyway - consider long & hard whether that is because those stories don't actually EXIST... or because you aren't safe enough to be entrusted w/ them.